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### Mentor's Introduction

Enid Zimmerman

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# *mentor's introduction*

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In the final analysis, it is the kinds of access ethnic minority students have to the content and substance of education, and the interactions between students and teachers in individual schools and classrooms that define educational quality and equality, not with whom the students attend school.

Geneva Gay (1989, p. 175-176)

Mei-Fen Chen, like Gay, is interested in "the kinds of access ethnic minority [specifically Chinese-American students] have to the content and substance of education." Chen argues, however, that most research relating to multicultural education has emphasized study of teachers and students and has not included community groups that play important roles in the "educational quality and equality" of our nation's schools.

Chen, a Chinese student from Taiwan who is studying art education in the United States, has focused her attention on issues and perspectives that arise when East meets West in school practices in the United States. This interest dates back several years to her Master's thesis when she reflected upon her experiences teaching Chinese papercutting to elementary students and Chinese calligraphy to secondary students in Indiana schools. She wrote in the conclusion of her thesis:

These students are educated under a western system of art values and it is hard for them to feel the inner spirit in Chinese art. However, these West meets East experiences prove there can be an exciting interaction of cultures, concepts, and feelings in teaching art.

In her current research, she is particularly interested in how cultural heritage, through study of Chinese art, is taught to Chinese-American students in a community-based Chinese school in a large city in the Midwest. Currently, there is a paucity of studies focusing on private community-based ethnic schools in the United States. Study of such schools, in respect to art education research, is almost nonexistent.

Mei-Fen Chen is a person who has great insight into multicultural concerns having lived in at least three different cultures herself: Chinese culture in the capital of Taiwan, western academic culture in a college town in a small Midwestern city in the United States, and Chinese-American culture in a large Midwestern city in the United States. Her research is about how Chinese-American students' self awareness, interpretations, value judgements, and beliefs about their art and cultural heritage are influenced by their study at a Chinese community school and a regular public school. This study should add to our understanding as to how these students make transitions between cultures of the West and East. Mei-Fen Chen's sensitivity and depth of understanding about multicultural issues and practices in art education are evident as she begins her research. The questions she poses and the means she proposes for answering them indicate great promise for the outcomes of this research.

### Reference

- Gay, G. (1989). Ethnic minorities and educational equality. In J. A. Banks & C. A. McGee Banks (Eds.), **Multicultural education: Issues and perspectives**. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.